

MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF THE SOCIETY OF WOMEN MUSICIANS held on Sunday 31 January 1971 at Flat 14 96/100 New Cavendish St. W.1. (by kind invitation of Barbara Bendixson) 3p.m.

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|-----------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Present:- | Margaret Paterson (in the chair) | Noreen Masol      |
|           | Muriel Dawson Hon. Treasurer     | Eleanor Retallack |
|           | Sara Barrington                  | Eleanor Richards  |
|           | Margaret Benselin                | Grace Shearer     |
|           | Rosmary Brown                    | Delia Woolford    |
|           | Antonia Butler                   | Joan Kemp-Potter  |
|           | Dora Hanes                       | Barbara Bendixson |
|           | Kathleen Hurran                  | Marian Attwood    |
|           | Carola Grindea                   | Phyllis Norbrook  |

In attendance Sarah Greenwood

Apologies for absence were received from:- The President, Anna Berenska, Angela Hickey and Jennifer Partridge.

The Chairman opened the meeting by explaining that the reasons for calling it were to place before the Council the present position of the Society, and to invite frank discussion as to the future policy to be adopted.

On the financial side it was clear that we could not continue our present policy for very much longer. The loss of Four St James's Square for our concerts incurred much heavier expenditure in order to hire such places as Leighton House, or the British Institute of Recorded Sound, added to which there was the storage cost of our Steinway piano. We could reckon that not less than £20 a month would be spent in this way, which did not take into account the Artists' expenses. Without much greater support than we had enjoyed recently, we would not be able to survive much longer.

The Chairman then turned to the latest developments concerning Four St James's Square, which she reported were almost but not quite hopeless. Her letter to the Telegraph, though shortened featured as the principal letter on Saturday 23 January 1971. The list of signatures was indeed most impressive. Lord Goodman had promised to do what he could to help us. Letters had appeared in the Times from people mainly concerned with the amenity side of the problem. Lady Dartmouth as Chairman of the Historic Buildings Board had also protested but directly to the Minister of Housing and Construction.

The Chairman had had a meeting with Mr Ivan O, Chance Chairman of the Georgian Group. They had decided to write to the Prime Minister on behalf of the amenity groups and artistic societies respectively, appealing to him to issue a directive about Four St James's Square. These letters, timed to arrive simultaneously, would thus constitute a two-pronged attack our last hope of saving the house from the clutches of the law.

Meantime a practical offer of help had come from the Chairman of Rio Tinto-Zinc Corp. Ltd at Number Six St James's Square, offering the use of their hall (seating capacity about 160) as a temporary measure. The Chairman could not say whether they would be willing to house our piano at Number six, or whether the premises would be suitable or indeed acceptable to our Artists, but its nearness to our old home made the idea very attractive. She was negotiating for a meeting to discuss this possibility.

If there was no action on the part of the government to change the present policy of using Four St James's Square for criminal courts, it would be April 1st 1974 before it would be free.

The meeting was then thrown open to the Council Members. Marian Attwood said that one very important aspect of the Society was the fact that it had only been able to survive the last few years through the energy and drive of the Chairman. She had indicated her intention to vacate the chair in October after the Jubilee Celebrations in July. Marian doubted very much whether we would ever have another Chairman with these qualities in ....

qualities in/ such abundance. The Chairman thanked Marian for her remarks but said she could not agree with her. No Society that had lived for sixty years was dependant on one member for its survival. What she wanted the Council to decide was:-

- A. Had the Society fulfilled its original function of putting women musicians on the map; and, if so, was it time to 'go out' while the Society still had a 'voice'?
- B. If it was decided to carry on, what revision in our policy would the Council recommend?

There was then considerable discussion concerning the reasons for the present position. It was agreed that, although the loss of Four St James's Square was a contributory factor, it was by no means the whole answer. The main trouble was lack of support from Members, which had been a source of great embarrassment, when Artists of international reputation had offered their services, and had been faced with very poor audiences. Sara Barrington said it was of great help to young performers to give recitals even when the audience was very small.

Eleanor Richards thought that the improved college facilities and lunch hour recitals were contributory factors: even these recitals were experiencing difficulty in keeping their audiences. If concerts which were offered free, were badly attended, she saw little hope of our concerts attracting better audiences.

Eleanor Retallack felt that, when a society had to struggle to gain members, the time had come to ask ourselves whether we were really wanted. Perhaps it was the 'suffragette' aspect of an 'all woman' society that appeared rather ridiculous and unacceptable to the younger generation in 1971.

Joan Kemp-Potter thought that too much emphasis was being placed on the concerts. Surely there was a need for the Society if only from a fellowship point of view. The Chairman agreed and said that she fondly hoped that one day Four St James's Square would be an International Arts Club for the use of both men and women. This dream, however, could not be put forward at the earliest, until 1974 by which time, our Society might well have faded out of existence.

The possibility of disbanding the Society and reforming with a different image or as a branch of the Incorporated Society of Musicians, was then discussed. Joan Kemp-Potter said that we must remember that it was all too easy to wind up a society, but getting support to reform was a very different matter. She thought that a decision must be made to recommend to our Members either A. disbandment or B. continue to function in a rather different way.

She then said that if this meeting decided to adopt recommendation B. i.e. that the Society should continue to function, she would like to propose that a sub-committee be formed to re-assess the function and policy of the Society, the said committee to have powers to co-opt members either within or outside the Society, who could be of assistance to them. This sub-committee would be required to report to the Council. This proposal was seconded by Sara Barrington.

The Chairman then said that, although she had no wish to influence Council Members, she thought that she should point out before they voted on the two proposals set before them, that for a society such as ours to flourish it was essential that it be numerically strong. Our financial adviser, Mr Saunders had intimated to her that he was of the opinion that the Society should disband rather than continue with the very real possibility of being forced to fade out.

On a show of hands, albeit with reluctance on the part of many Council Members, the following recommendation was adopted:-

Proposed by Barbara Bondixson and seconded by Phyllis Norbrook. That the Council recommends that an Extraordinary General Meeting be called, at which Members of the Society be asked to vote either for or against the disbandment of the Society, having been notified of the serious difficulties in which the Society now finds itself and which gave rise to the necessity to consider the whole future of the Society.

It was then proposed by Joan Kemp-Potter and seconded by Kathleen Hurran, that, if Members voted in favour of disbandment, the assets of the Society be offered to the Incorporated Society of Musicians to be used to continue Ivimey Concerts for the promotion of women musicians for as long as the money lasted. It would be intimated to the I.S.M., that this Society would greatly appreciate the co-opting of two Members of this Society onto their Council.

The Chairman then said that she thought that the Council had explored pretty thoroughly the various possibilities open to us. A great deal rested on the outcome of her meeting with the Chairman of Rio Tinto-Zinc Corporation Ltd, on which she hoped to be able to report at the next Council meeting on 10 February, this would be held at 100, Piccadilly, The Public Schools Club at 10.30 unless Council Members heard to the contrary. Before closing the meeting, she would like to thank Barbara Bondixson not only for her wonderful hospitality in allowing this invasion of her flat on a Sunday afternoon, but also for the delicious and most welcome tea. On behalf of the Members of the Council she wished Barbara a very happy holiday.

Chairman  
31st January 1971